

On the Positive Side: Help line provides animal advice, information

By Bill Smith For the Sun-News

Posted: 10/25/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT

One call may not do it all, but oftentimes it can put pet owners on the path to getting information or help they need, especially if it's a call to the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico pet help line, telephone (575) 523-8020.

The pet help line is an important HSSNM program and public service. Volunteers answer incoming calls from members of the public, responding to questions and concerns about animals. They assist callers with finding lost animals, returning found animals, dealing with homeless/orphan animals and finding adoptable pets. They also provide references in response to questions about health care and animal behavior.

But more than simply providing information to callers, the help line volunteers, through a network of some 200 animal advocates in the Las Cruces/Do-a Ana County area, take an active part in helping to locate lost companion animals, returning found pets to their owners, or finding new homes for animals whose owners for one reason or another can no longer care for them (re-homing).

Families most often consider re-homing a pet due to economic difficulty, health issues, job transfers or military deployment, but sometimes behavioral problems with the pet are the cause. Then owners are encouraged to retain their pet and try to correct the problem before deciding on re-homing.

When re-homing a pet seems to be the only solution, help line volunteers try to find new homes for the pets through one of the local volunteer services or pet foster families. In this way we help to relieve our municipal shelter, the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley, from the burden of caring for even more unwanted animals.

The HSSNM help line volunteers rely on a number of resources in responding to calls. The primary resource is the Animal Resource Guide compiled by Michel Meunier, president, ACTION Programs for Animals, a volunteer handbook, and the experience of Jean Gilbert, HSSNM humane educator. HSSNM cooperates and shares information with ASCMV, Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary, and ACTION Programs for Animals, which provides similar help line information on programs and services for companion animals. When not responding to help line calls, volunteers assist with clerical work in the HSSNM office.

Volunteering with the HSSNM help line can be an alternative way to for animal lovers who may not be able to have a companion animal in their home to still contribute to helping animals. And there are those who find working directly with shelter animals is too stressful. Here again the pet help line provides a less threatening way for them to express their compassion for animals. Volunteer training and mentoring are provided.

The HSSNM pet help line is staffed Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to noon, and on Monday and Wednesday afternoons from 1 to 5 p.m. The HSSNM help line volunteers are particularly eager to get calls that begin, "I would like to be a help-line volunteer."

Bill Smith is an HSSNM help line volunteer.

For help

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